

SOCIALIST REVIEW

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Syria: crisis, Revolution, war



Nationalise Oceania!



Ports of Auckland

IT'S RIGHT

TO STRIKE!





The International Socialist Organisation is a group of revolutionaries that are part of Te Mana movement. We are active in campaigns, protests, on campuses, and in the union movement.

Socialism

Capitalism is a system of crisis, exploitation and war in which production is for profit not human need. Although workers create society's wealth, they have no control over its production or distribution. A new society can only be built when workers collectively seize control of that wealth and create a new state in which they will make the decisions about the economy, social life and the environment.

Workers' Power

Only the working class has the power to create a society free from exploitation, oppression and want. Liberation can be won only through the struggles of workers themselves, organised independently of other classes and fighting for real workers' power – a new kind of state based on democratically elected workers' councils. China and Cuba, like the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, have nothing to do with socialism. They are repressive state capitalist regimes. We support the struggles of workers against every ruling class.

Liberation From Oppression

We fight for democratic rights. We are opposed to all forms of racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia. These forms of oppression are used to divide the working class. We support the right of all oppressed groups to organise for their own defence. All these forms of liberation are essential to socialism and impossible without it.

Revolution Not Reformism

Despite the claims of the Labour Party and Trade Union Leaders, the structures of the present parliament, army, police, and judiciary cannot be taken over and used by the working class. They grew up under capitalism and are designed to protect the ruling class against workers. There is no parliamentary road to socialism.

Internationalism

Workers in every country are exploited by capitalism, so the struggle for socialism is part of a worldwide struggle. We oppose everything that divides workers of different countries. We oppose all immigration controls. We campaign for solidarity with workers in other countries. We oppose imperialism and support all genuine national liberation struggles.

Tino Rangatiratanga

We support the struggle for tino rangatiratanga. Māori capitalists and corporate Iwi leaders have no interest in achieving tino rangatiratanga for working class Māori. The government and corporate warriors' approach to Treaty claims has benefited a Māori elite while doing little for working class Māori. Tino rangatiratanga cannot be achieved within capitalism. It will only become a reality with the establishment of a workers' state and socialist society.

Environment

Exploitation of nature is as central to capitalism as exploitation of labour. Capitalism everywhere drains the earth of its resources for the profit of the few, devastating the environment and the lives of ordinary people in the process. Climate change is transforming the earth and threatening life as we know it. To stop it, humanity must re-organise its relation to the earth. The fight for socialism, led by the working class, is at the same time a fight to create a world where human beings live sustainably with the environment.

Revolutionary Organisation

To achieve socialism, the most militant sections of the working class have to be organised into a revolutionary socialist party. Such a party can only be built by day-to-day activity in the mass organisations of the working class. We have to prove in practice to other workers that reformist leaders and reformist ideas are opposed to their own interests. We have to build a rank and file movement within the unions. If you agree with our ideas and want to fight for socialism, we urge you to join us.

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Editorial

Our last issue argued that we were facing a bosses' offensive, as the ruling class, impatient to make the most out of Key and National's second term, pushed for direct attacks on workers' rights and conditions. The ongoing economic crisis in global capitalism has given an edge to these attacks, and local political factors are in play too: sensing that 2011 may represent the high water mark of Key's popularity and influence, the bosses are keen to score some important victories while the initiative is still with them.

Not everything has gone their way, though; far from it. Certainly there have been attacks, and

vicious ones at that. As this issue goes to print hundreds of Meatworkers' Union members continue heroically to

defy Talley's lockout and to insist on their rights and conditions. The company would starve them into surrender, but solidarity, regular collections and political determination have helped the Meatworkers put up the kind of fight Talley's said early in the dispute just wasn't in them. We salute their courage and determination – they are an example to all unionists.

On the wharves, too, the bosses' offensive encountered complications it hadn't anticipated. Having crowed about how it was 'too late' for any changes, Ports of Auckland CEO Tony Gibson – the three-quarters of a million dollar man – had to face a humiliating back down and MUNZ workers broke

both his redundancy plans and his lockout. The fight at the Port isn't over by any stretch, but the fight MUNZ has put up so far has helped energise and inspire the wider union movement. For most of February and March it was workers' resistance that was the polarizing issue, not the bosses attack – that assertiveness has helped shift the national political mood.

At a more trivial level, there are signs that the seemingly all-confident front National presents is starting to fracture. From Nick Smith's resignation – and the wider ACC scandal – to slip-ups from Gerry Brownlee over Christchurch, the popularity and

competence of National seems less convincing with each day.

None of this means that the

threats of the offensive are off, or that our side is taking the counter-offensive. Labour remains confused and bewildered, with a weak and babbling leader, and the bosses are playing a long game. But the balance may be beginning to shift.

This issue of Socialist Review covers some of the issues we think will be key to the coming months, and aims to offer analysis and strategy for rebuilding a fighting workers' movement.

Dougal McNeil

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Current Struggles

Striking workers seize the headlines



Workers' struggles took the headlines in February as wharfies, aged care workers and meat workers struck during February and March. In the most high-profile struggle, wharfies in Auckland struck to stop casualisation at the Ports of Auckland, which would see the minimum shift length reduced and rostered weekends off a thing of the past. Meat workers at the Talley's-owned AFFCO plants were locked out after they refused to bow to management demands to speed-up production with no extra pay. At Oceania Rest Homes, care workers struck after management offered only a paltry 1% pay increase. On some days, more than 2,000 workers fought

back as bosses around the country took to the offensive against unionised workers.

5,000 march in support of Auckland wharfies

5,000 unionists from dozens of unions marched on March 10 in support of striking wharfies. Meat workers and fire fighters, fresh from their own struggles, lent some of the most vocal support.

Marchers called on Len Brown, the "left-leaning" Mayor of Auckland to side with workers in the dispute, a demand he has so far refused, despite the fact that wharfies contributed \$2,000 to his election campaign. See more on the Ports of Auckland struggle on page 12.

Pike River Inquiry

Hearings in the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Pike River mining disaster which claimed the lives of 29 miners in November 2010 finished on April 4. The inquiry was told of the dysfunctional management at the mine, the pressures put on staff to meet production targets which resulted in short cuts around health and safety and deliberate tampering with equipment meant to monitor the levels of methane, an explosive gas, in the mine. Attention was also drawn to the lack of mine inspectors at the Department of Labour, which made outside monitoring of health and safety compliance impossible. The commission is due to present its final report on September 28.

Hospital budgets squeezed

District Health Boards are facing funding shortfalls as the government has steadily reduced the amount of money available for them to meet rising costs. Budget shortfalls have already led to pressure on hospital staffing levels. The Auckland District Health Board froze all hiring activity for two days in March. 35 jobs are to be cut at Hawke's Bay DHB and the Bay of Plenty DHB has also been instructed by the government to cut staff. Short staffing - such as the extra shifts required of Middlemore Hospital staff to deal with the winter flu season - contribute to poorer health outcomes and a growing gap in wellbeing between rich and poor in Aotearoa, described by the UK medical journal Lancet as a "sad indictment of the powerful".



State Housing tenants fight eviction

Over 150 Housing NZ tenants in Glen Innes and nearby Auckland suburbs are fighting to keep their homes after Housing NZ announced that state housing land in the area had been sold to developers.

Protestors and residents angry at the decision staged a sit-in and occupied an empty house in the area.

Other residents are refusing to move. "I'm one of those that are not going to leave their homes" says 49 year-old Materoa Kanuta, who lives in a state house with her husband and two daughters and walks to work at a nearby school. Other tenants facing eviction include returned servicemen and their families, who were given their homes at the end of the Second World War. Further protests occurred as demolition work began on the first homes in April. Housing NZ has sold the properties to a private developer, who wants to replace the state houses with luxury villas.

Urewera 4 in court

The trial of the four remaining defendants of the Urewera "terror raids" case began on the 13th of February.

Charges against 13 of the original defendants were dropped after it was revealed police had used illegal surveillance to obtain "evidence".

When the trial ended on March 20, the police had failed to secure convictions on the most serious charges of "belonging to a criminal group". But the police officer responsible for the case says he "was not hung up" on the jury's decision. Despite their failure, police gained sweeping new powers as a result of the Search and Surveillance bill passed two days after the trial.

But the assault on democracy is international too. Only a day before the Urewera 4's trial concluded, courts in Zimbabwe convicted 5 socialists on trumped up charges after they were arrested more than a year ago at a film screening about the Egyptian revolution.

Police shootings, brutality cases in Rotorua



Police brutality was in the spotlight again in early April after it was admitted that police shot Napier man Lachlan Kelly-Tumarae not once as was originally asserted, but at least eight and as many as fifteen times, fatally wounding the 19-year old. Questions were also asked of another case where police opened fire on Auckland's Southern Motorway, shooting two bystanders and killing one. In another case, a Rotorua police officer was convicted after bashing a man with a torch.

National Party Vetoes Extending paid parental leave

The National government plans to veto a bill before Parliament to extend the period of paid parental leave from 14 weeks to six months. A veto would prevent the bill from passing into law, despite the support of a majority in Parliament.

The government says undemocratic measures are needed to prevent budget blowouts - despite the fact that the estimated cost of the legislation is \$700 million compared with the more than \$2 billion National has doled out to the richest New Zealanders in tax cuts.

Nazis march in Christchurch

Over 100 white supremacist skinheads and their supporters marched in public through the streets of Christchurch for the first time in years on March 28. They were led by the neo-Nazi "Right Wing Resistance" and supported by groups from around the country. The march comes after a racist leafleting campaign from the group, targeting Asians, and accompanies a spate of violent attacks on Asian immigrants.

**Briefs written by
Cory Anderson**



Workers Struggles

War to the knife: Meatworkers fight back

Multi-millionaire Kiwi capitalists the Talley family have launched an attack on freezing workers they employ at AFFCO plants in the North Island. Talley's control a huge chunk of New Zealand's food production and make fat profits. The freezing workers they employ are willing to fight for the right to a union contract. And that's why they are under attack.

Talleys is a notoriously anti-union company. It knows that in the past, strong unions in the meat works have won real gains for working people. The company has locked out 1000 union meatworkers in an attempt to smash the union. "The company is fighting as to who manages Affco," a Talleys lackey says. "Essentially, it is a struggle over management control."

The core pay rates for meat workers are pitifully low - ranging from \$13.48 to \$15.76 an hour. This rate is topped up to between \$27 and \$31 an hour if workers meet the quota for the day, which sounds reasonable until you realise the employment is seasonal. The season can be as long as 11 months and as short as 10 weeks.

Talleys wants to set this quota as high as it likes. In an industry already plagued by accidents and repetitive strain injuries, company control means increased casualties in a one-sided class war. This lockout is the latest attack on our unions and if successful will slash wages and conditions not just for meat workers but for all workers, as other bosses are emboldened to play hard ball in contract negotiations.

Class war in the countryside

In the New Zealand export economy, farming is king. Those who own the land and the factories make mega-profits at the expense of workers who process the food and export it to the world who are being pushed into poverty. Federated Farmers loves to boast that 65% of New Zealand's export wealth is created by just 14% of the population.

In the case of dairy farming the situation is even more extreme. Fewer than 14,000 farmers (the number is constantly falling as mega-farms become the norm) earn \$10.4 billion in exports. According to this view, farmers are supposed to be creating huge amounts of wealth which is then frittered away on the dole-bludging working classes. But in the real world, farmers do not shear their own sheep and, often as not, do not milk their own cows. They don't drive their stock to the meat works, or butcher them there. They don't work on the railways, waterfront, or ships that bring their stock to market.

It's in the countryside that the class war is clearest - and the growth of mega-farms is making it clearer every day. Farmers have always been at odds with working people. Although many immigrants hoped to find land to farm, most remained wage workers. The first industrial unions were, not surprisingly for an agricultural country, in shearing, the meat works, and the wharfs. Farmers found their interests opposed to trade unions at an early stage and became allies for the ruling class. While the most

powerful group in our society is the capitalist elite, they make up such a small percentage of the population that to rule, they need the support of other groups. Farmers, who work their own land and employ labour, have proved to be pillars of capitalism - they have physically smashed up striking workers more than once and they have provided the voting base for the National Party.

Small capitalists, Giant capitalists

Farmers are small capitalists. They work their own parcel of land and employ one or two staff year-round, and contract out jobs like shearing. The big profits in agriculture go to the big capitalists. Sometimes farmers have banded together to set up capitalist combines like the Alliance meatworks group, or a dairy company, like Fonterra, but often these are private companies.

Talley's is a behemoth. One of the biggest privately owned companies in New Zealand, it controls seafood, dairy and vegetable processing plants and employs about 4500 workers. The National Business Review Rich List has estimated the Talley family's wealth at \$300 million. They are notoriously anti-union and a major funder of right-wing politicians.

The number of farmers in New Zealand is constantly decreasing as agri-business takes over. But because farmers 'own' their own land they have internalised the capitalist mindset of competition, there is no way they will provide any opposition to this process.

Workers rights and tino rangatiratanga

It's not only class war that's clearest in the countryside – the legacy of the land wars still lives on. The meatworkers struggle is also a struggle for tino rangatiratanga – self-determination.

Think about Te Kuiti the shearing capital of New Zealand. Te Kuiti is in the heart of the King Country, the last bastion of Maori sovereignty after the British invasion of the Waikato. The town itself consistently votes left, but the surrounding country is dominated by Pakeha farmers. The landless working class of the town are Maori, while the farmers occupying their ancestral lands are overwhelmingly Pakeha. There are a hundred other towns with the same suppressed history.

Ever since Maori worked for wages they have combined in trade unions to fight for their rights – a historic alignment that TW Ratana recognised in his deal with the First Labour Government in 1936. This is the secret of the bitterness of the struggle between capitalists and farmers and the freezing workers' unions. It's also the reason the freezing workers have historically been on the frontlines of workers struggles – winning in the past some of the best wages and conditions enjoyed by workers anywhere in the world.

Treaty rights and strikes

Those conditions have been cut back over the past three decades since the 1984 Labour Government blindsided its working class supporters with a pro-business



Blitzkrieg. The same government increased the power of the Waitangi Tribunal, which has resulted in some (minimal) compensation being paid for land stolen or fraudulently taken.

But the millions paid in one-off full and final settlements, which were supposed to recreate the basis for Maori economic equality, came at the same time as Maori were hit by massive redundancies in manufacturing, forestry, railways and other sectors. Between 1987 and 1989 one fifth of Maori were laid off. In the recession of the 1990s, Maori unemployment rates were much higher than Pakeha – on a par with the Great Depression of the 1930s.

This struggle is about control. The meat industry is dangerous and unpredictable. At present, there is a massive overcapacity in the works because farmers hold back their stock each season until the price peaks, then release the animals all at once. This may ensure high prices for farmers but it means worry and insecurity for meatworkers. The demand for decent wages and

conditions is a demand for more workers control in the industry.

Public opinion or hard pickets?

Workers have been on the back foot for the last thirty years in New Zealand. Strike rates have fallen as fast as the wealth of the rich list has risen. Our side has lost much of the tactics, strategies and skills needed to stage a successful strike. The union leadership in the Ports of Auckland dispute and the Tally's lockout have preferred campaigns pitched towards public opinion – for fear the government will have an excuse for more anti-union laws.

Another tactic is to forget about public opinion for now and concentrate on running tough pickets – nothing in, nothing out. This will result in us being accused of intimidating strike breakers and non-union staff, but it will also hit the company where it hurts – in the bottom line. If the unions show they have the courage to fight back, and show political leadership, they will not just win over “public opinion”, they will shape public opinion.

Andrew Tait

Low paid women in revolt: Nationalise Oceania!

Low paid aged care workers at Oceania homes have been driven to revolt. Members of the Service and Food Workers Union Nga Ringa Tota and nurses in the NZNO first struck on 1st March, and again on 7th.

Stopwork meetings took place on 14th March and strikes on the 19th and again on 5th April. Staffs at more and

more of Oceania's 57 homes have joined in the action as the campaign has worn on. Joint union spokesperson Alistair Duncan has explained,

"Initially support for industrial action was strongest in Auckland, but commitment to on-going strike action to win this dispute has now spread beyond the metropolitan centres to heartland New Zealand. Workers at smaller rest homes in locations like Pahiatua, Whitianga and Gisborne are standing up and saying enough is enough."

Oceania homes are run on public money for private profit. Oceania pay their care givers an appalling basic rate of just \$13.61, a smidgen above the minimum wage. Qualified nurses are paid more of course, but less than in the public sector. They only get \$8.33 on top of basic when they work a weekend shift.

Oceania received a government funding increase in June 2011

but are only offering to pass it to a pay increase to staff from February 2012. Another funding increase due in June this year would be held back from pay until February 2013. In addition to holding back pay rises Oceania has been wanting to cut

Oceania homes are run on public money for private profit. Oceania pay their care givers an appalling basic rate of just \$13.61, a smidgen above the minimum wage

overtime rates and exclude hundreds of staff from the collective agreement.

As paymasters the government are partners in this crime. Below inflation funding increases, even if they were passed on to pay, keep staff on poverty rates. The unions wrote to Health Minister Tony Ryall asking him to investigate why Oceania had not passed on the public funding, but no response was received.

Workers in caring jobs find it difficult to take action. Strikes that were to take place on 11th and 12th April were cancelled because of worries about residents. As the union explained:

"Both unions gave extended notice of industrial action so Oceania would have plenty of time to make arrangements, but we are becoming increasingly concerned that Oceania has not cared for its residents."

"We have reports of elderly residents not being fed. We have reports of residents not being showered. We have reports of residents not being cared for, of students being asked to do the work of professionals, of agency staff not responding to residents needs and of non-union cleaning staff being pulled off their duties to do personal cares. None of this is acceptable. While members have endorsed further action, we will put this on hold until we can be sure Oceania residents are being properly supported."

The industrial power of care workers is limited. The responsibility to stand with them lies with the whole of the working class movement. The SWFU and NZNO should not have to battle on alone. The Council of Trade Unions and all unions

Quite simply, Oceania and the other private providers should be nationalised without compensation.

should back any future strike actions to the hilt by calling on members to join in public protests in

town after town.

The political parties are responsible for the elderly care service being run for profit. As the public pays for the elderly care, why should profit be skimmed off at the expense of poverty pay and minimal standards? Quite simply, Oceania and the other private providers should be nationalised without compensation.



Labour Party?

Those false friends of workers, the Labour Party, could make nationalisation a manifesto policy and pledge to make elderly care the quality public service it should be. Keeping the status quo means condemning women care workers to poverty pay indefinitely, because that is what contracted out services are designed for. Only as a public service could care workers ever get the recognition they deserve for demanding jobs that few men are emotionally equipped to do.

Are Aussie bosses the problem?

There is another false friend abroad, and that is the call for New Zealand ownership. Bryan Gould wrote an otherwise excellent piece on the dispute, but lamented that Oceania was Australian-owned (NZH, 14 March 2012).

"Like most overseas owners, Oceania have little knowledge of and even less interest in the welfare of their New Zealand workers - to say nothing of New Zealand customers and taxpayers."

"The real goal of privatised companies is profit, not service. We cannot prevent privatised firms - despite the government's obfuscation on this issue - from falling into foreign hands. Enterprises owned overseas have little concern for the interests of their workforce. New Zealand workers are increasingly at the mercy of hard-nosed employers."

Quite frankly this all-New Zealanders-together nationalism is nonsense. The for-profit elderly care service is a made in New Zealand construct. It operates under New Zealand made anti-union labour laws. There is no evidence at all that New Zealand employers are better to their workers than Australian; in fact it would be easy to make an argument to the contrary. But it is not a question what set of employers have better morals because all capitalists have the same immorality, to exploit and make the most profit possible. The New Zealand ruling class is as greedy as any and gets away with it more than most. The main enemy is at home. The real question Bryan Gould should be asking is how do we build a workers' movement powerful enough to get rid of the profit system?

Martin Gregory

Reflections on the Ports of Auckland dispute

The Ports of Auckland company (POAL) is wholly owned by Auckland Council, run by Labour Party member Mayor Len Brown and Labour-led City Vision ticket councillors. In base treachery these council leaders have been overseeing an attempted re-run of the 1951 defeat of the Auckland wharfies. Labour Party leader David Shearer first struck a pose of neutrality, but the tide of sympathy for the wharfies forced him pretend support by speaking at their 10 March rally. The POAL board's embarrassing dirty tactics, including the leaking of an employee's personal details to be used by a rightwing blog, have given Len Brown and the council ample reasons to sack the port board, but so far (mid April) they have failed to act. The Labour Party's rhetorical support for the wharfies will be utterly hollow unless they expel Brown and find another mayoral candidate for the next elections.

Background to the dispute

Workers at POAL have been employed through a collective agreement, negotiated on their behalf by the Maritime Union (MUNZ). Their collective agreement expired last September. There was a lot of flexibility built into the old collective agreement. It allowed for up to 25% of the workforce to be casual employees, who are not guaranteed any work, are employed shift-by-shift and can only rely on a guaranteed 8 hours minimum if they are called in. The agreement allows for a further 27% of the workforces to be employed as "P24s" - permanent workers who are guaranteed at least 24 hours per week (3 x 8 hour shifts). The remaining 53% of the workforce are full-time permanent employees, entitled to 40 hours per week over 7 days. They are able to stipulate one preferred day off per week, otherwise they must work any day, at any time of day.

The flexibility has ensured that POAL has operated at a high intensity of workforce exploitation that returned a healthy rate of profit, but Auckland Council demanded that profits be doubled. In any rational society New Zealand's ports would work together harmoniously, but under the free market model the port companies are set up to compete against each other in a scramble for profit. Worker exploitation is even greater at Tauranga, the country's next largest port, where work is contracted out to stevedoring companies and the workforce is much more casualised. The Tauranga model is what the POAL board want to implement and they caused the dispute by trying to ram casualisation through in collective contract negotiations.

The state of play at mid April

At the time this article was being penned the dispute at POAL was ongoing and its eventual outcome far from clear. The POAL board had been demanding nothing less than the capitulation of MUNZ to casualisation. The board rejected concession after concession offered by MUNZ to make the expiring agreement even more flexible. The board had not achieved their aims thanks to the steadfastness of MUNZ's 297 POAL members, who by taking strike action since 24 February saw off the immediate threat of mass sackings. In their arrogance the POAL board had blatantly flouted the Employment Relations Act. On 27 March MUNZ won a temporary injunction at the Employment Court to stop POAL making redundancies and contracting out illegally, and from 5 April the wharfies were back at work but under extremely provocative employer behaviour: i.e. security guards rife in the workplace, including in the canteens where workers are supposed to be on a break; banning of union signage; cameras installed in crane cabs and canteens. Talks with POAL had resumed but the company were maintaining a hard line. On 12 April a Maritime Union (MUNZ) statement said:

Members of the Maritime Union were frustrated today that in mediation the Ports of Auckland has tabled a document that presses ahead with reductions to job security for wharfies. Maritime Union president Garry Parsloe said that company proposals not only reduce employee protections in the event of contracting out, but also continue to insist on the removal of employment security that would result in wharfies having no guaranteed days off, no protection against casualisation and a package that would significantly reduce their pay.

After two days of fruitless talks both parties agreed to go to "facilitation".



MUNZ 'picket' at Ports of Auckland. A great inspiration to the workers movement. But not militant enough to block the gates.

Questions for the union movement

The conduct of the dispute so far and the prospects for MUNZ's ultimate success has put the spotlight on a number of important issues for the union movement. Not least of these is the placing of any reliance on the law. MUNZ's recourse to the law, the line pushed by the Council of Trade Unions, may prove to be a double-edged sword. The union won a legal argument that knocked the POAL board back and exposed its internal divisions, as shown by the resignation of board member Rob Campbell. Whether the board, and their political masters, have been sufficiently chastened for them to back off from casualisation in exchange for some face saving concessions by the union remains to be seen.

The downside of the legal entanglement has resulted in the union also losing momentum by calling off the industrial action and, after a lockout, the return to work taking the economic pressure off the port. If the POAL board do not back down and instead resume their drive to casualise the workforce, this time legally, MUNZ will be back at square one with their backs against the wall, having to restart an industrial action campaign all over again.

Although MUNZ has been able to use the Employment Relations Act (ERA) to restrain the

port company from mass sackings during contract negotiations, the law generally and the judiciary are not neutral but are strongly biased against workers. The same ERA, disgracefully brought in by Helen Clark's Labour government, is one of the most draconian in the world in preventing workers from exercising their right to take industrial action. Strikes can only take place legally within strictly limited bounds. Crucially, solidarity industrial action is outlawed.

The capitalist class fears nothing more than the workers' ace card of solidarity. It is precisely in the shipping and port working industries where workers have most strongly established the traditions of solidarity action. The legal ban, which also exists in Australia, strikes at the heart of the New Zealand port workers' abilities to defend themselves from casualisation and contracting out.

Despite admirable sporadic acts of unofficial solidarity action around New Zealand ports, and by Maritime Union of Australia members in Sydney, MUNZ has not been prepared to defy an unjust and anti-working class law by calling for official solidarity strikes in New Zealand and the international blacklisting of ships worked by scab labour at Auckland.

Nobody can say that for MUNZ to confront the law by calling solidarity action would be easy. It would



Around 5000 people turn out to show their support for Aucklands wharfies.

mean breaking with the CTU's subservience to the 'rule of law'. It would mean readiness to defy the Employment Court and to expose the union to legal action. But if POAL management were to resume their nefarious plans the union would risk allowing casualisation to succeed if it denied itself the calling of effective solidarity action.

By the same law-abiding token a weakness of the wharfies' action in the dispute so far has been to "picket" (i.e. not really picket) on roadsides to solicit the toots of motorists as tokens of the public support that they undoubtedly enjoy. Tokens of public support, such as online petitions, do not weigh in the balance in the same way as effective mass pickets. History shows that picket lines that achieve the shutdown of business, i.e. lines not crossed by delivery transport or scab labour, are the tactics that win disputes. If the port company forces the issue of casualisation, and appeals to the politicians prove fruitless, the winning of the dispute may depend on the union's willingness to use militant tactics, regardless of the anti-worker laws. There is a question mark over the Maritime Union's commitment to traditional union tactics, given that it has shown a willingness to concede further on casualisation during talks rather than

stand firm. If the need to restart industrial action arises MUNZ should call on the working class community to join their Auckland picket line and send flying pickets to spread the action to other ports.

At the 10 March rally in Auckland some 4-5000 trade unionists turned out to support the wharfies. The rally was a form of solidarity action that was effective in so far as it was a morale boost to the wharfies and put pressure on Auckland Council. Given the political dimension to the dispute applying pressure on the council is a rightful thing to do. MUNZ's slogans were aimed in this direction. But a strategy that puts hopes only on a political solution, legal action and compromise negotiations is risky. MUNZ's real muscle lies in spreading the dispute beyond Auckland.

Some of the speeches at the rally shed light on the problems of the union movement of today. Pledges of support by International Transport Workers' Federation affiliated union leaders from Australia and the USA were pledges of financial support. The really effective dispute-winning action that the situation demanded was solidarity industrial action that puts the squeeze on the shipping industry. This

is not a matter of altruism by other port workers. The more that port employers in any one country get away with casualisation, the greater becomes the opportunity for the ports in other countries to follow suit. As the casualisation dominoes fall the potential for the international solidarity action, which has served to defend port workers so well before, becomes diminished. In an international industry it really is the case of 'United we stand, divided we fall'.

Another issue highlighted by the dispute is the effects of a divided workforce. For whatever the historical reasons, MUNZ's strength at POAL is weakened by the divisions between full-time, part-time and casual workers. Thus a proportion of the workforce is non-union and worked during the strikes. MUNZ's offers of further concessions in the direction of even more flexibility can only store up problems of disunity for the future. No doubt MUNZ negotiators consider that they have no choice but to try and salvage what they can of the expiring agreement. It comes back to the question of solidarity and what makes for truly effective industrial action. If the boot was on the union's foot MUNZ could go on the offensive and demand that casuals are made permanent and part-timers given the option of full-time contracts.

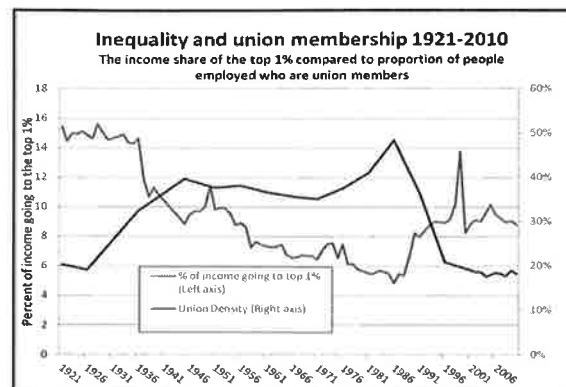
Subjecting MUNZ to the searching questions raised above is necessary. The attack on the wharfies is a life and death test that demands that the union is up to the task. For all the weaknesses of MUNZ's situation, the strike action taken by the Auckland wharfies to thwart the employer offensive so far has been an inspiration to the wider union movement. In truth, the 10 March rally for the wharfies probably did more good for building fighting spirit in the supporting unions that it did for MUNZ. MUNZ members have shown that fight backs against the most vicious employer attacks are possible. To turn round the tide of the neo-liberal assault on the working class that has gone on for 30 years, to go from the habits of defeat to the prospects of victories and socialism, we need to rebuild the fading union traditions of solidarity. A clear-cut victory for the wharfies will help that process immeasurably.

By Dave Kearns and Martin Gregory

It's Right to Strike!

Labour's spokesperson for labour issues, Darien Fenton, has called the Ports of Auckland dispute "some of the worst industrial action we've seen in New Zealand for a decade".

That pretty much sums up the difference between those who want to manage the capitalist system, whether Labour or National, and the interests of the working class. The worst industrial action of the last decade is all the strikes that NEVER happened. The Ports of Auckland dispute is the best fight our side, the working class, has put up in decades.



Check out this graph – it shows clearly that belonging to a union is the best way to build a fairer society. But belonging to a union means nothing if you can't go on strike. Check out the period from the latest 1970s to the mid '80s. This period saw the most people on strike in NZ history, and workers' wages and conditions were better than they are now, and poverty was nowhere near as entrenched.

Strikes are good. Strikes are necessary. In one sense, they are no big deal. Workers should strike every pay negotiation just to remind the boss of the value of our work. In another sense, strikes can change the world. As Lenin said, one general strike is worth ten general elections.

Len Brown wants to "move on" and it's only a matter of time before Darien Fenton joins in, encouraging workers to give up on this fight and wait to vote Labour back in 2014. Check out the graph again - union density starts falling in the 1980s, under the Lange Labour Government. "We're different now," Labour MPs like to say - however any supporting strikes are illegal under Labour's own law. What else must the workers movement do but smash an unjust law?

Andrew Tait

History and Theory

Troops out now: End the occupation of Afghanistan

On the 7th of October 2001, The United States, the United Kingdom and their Afghan allies, 'the Northern alliance' began the brutal military conquest of Afghanistan in an action which they pompously dubbed 'Operation Enduring Freedom'. As of June last year, a full decade after the initial invasion, this has become the longest war in the history of the United States.



Laura Bush greets NZ troops in Afghanistan June 2008

Since 'Operation Enduring freedom', the people of Afghanistan have suffered over a hundred thousand civilian casualties. The conquering armies have slaughtered civilians with impunity, using bombs laced with depleted uranium and terrorising them with white phosphorous, a substance that is known to burn human flesh and bones to cinders. Local warlords favoured by the occupiers also do their part, collaborating with the occupying forces in ensuring that countless thousands of their own people are taken to illegal torture camps, both in Afghanistan and around the world. Meanwhile throughout the Western world, Islamophobic hatred is whipped up in order to dehumanise and justify the actions of their governments. Make no mistake; this is a racist, colonial war. It is a war of conquest and subjugation and the people of Afghanistan who are having the very fabric of their society torn to pieces are made aware of it every day.

The resistance of the Afghan people has been desperate and furious. The United States and

its allies have been forced to escalate its occupation over the years. There around a hundred thousand troops in Afghanistan and the degree of militarisation in Afghanistan can only be considered astounding. It is also worth noting that today under Barrack Obama's administration there are more US troops stationed in Afghanistan than at any point of George Bush's presidency.

Behind Imperial Ambitions

What are the underlying reasons for the invasion of Afghanistan? In today's political discussions Imperialism is understandably regarded as a dirty word. Think about the tremendous efforts that States have used to justify their occupation of Afghanistan. In the media Muslim people, the people of the Middle East in particular have been consistently demonised; crudely caricatured as despotic, cruel and in need of having the civilising influence of Western democracy. Absurd rhetoric about the war in Afghanistan being about liberating Afghan women from

their burkhas is also prominent not to mention the constant labelling of the Muslim world as a seething hotbed of Islamic terrorism and of Muslim people as a barbarian hoard that threatens to overwhelm the West. All these justifications and smears are old imperialist tricks, re-hashed and regurgitated to cover up the true motives of modern imperialist ambitions.

Imperialism at every stage in human history has been about exploiting the many for the interests of the few and today's imperialism is no different. To understand the truth behind imperialism we need to understand its economic basis in the context of modern capitalism. Capitalism is not a system that is designed to satisfy human needs and wants; the point of production in capitalism is profit. For profits to increase enterprises need to grow; they need expand their markets, gain access to cheap labour and raw materials, so they can produce more and more. All this growth occurs within the framework of competition, which drives

businesses to push out competition and control more and more of the productive assets available to them. Eventually, productive assets become concentrated in the hands of a few, and in every capitalist nation a small minority will monopolise the bulk of those resources that everybody needs in order to survive. Controlling what people need confers tremendous power; social, economic and political and effectively the state will exist to serve the interests of this few.

Capitalism is a global economic system and corporate elites in every nation compete with each other on a global stage. In this monopoly phase of capitalism, the economic forces of competition and growth will cause national corporate interests to clash on a global level and individual states become the vehicles through which this conflict is played out. As elites in every country seek new markets and new resources in pursuit of more profit, war and the predatory imperialism of more advanced capitalist nations against the weaker ones becomes inevitable. Poorer, resource rich countries are overrun, culturally, economically and needs be militarily by stronger capitalist powers in order provide the corporate elites of these countries with new resources to plunder and new markets to exploit.

Afghanistan is often described as being of tremendous

How can we oppose Imperialism?

No military interventions acceptable

There is absolutely no such thing as a humanitarian intervention, paternalistic rhetoric is always used to justify the plunder and subjugation of the world and it again feeds into the racist notion that Non Westerners are incapable of ruling themselves.

Open Borders

Let the thousands of those victimised by colonial projects seek refuge wherever they want. Immigration policies that discourage refugees and migrants are a part of the racism that goes hand in hand with imperialism. Pasifika workers in Aotearoa are shipped here as cheap labour and sent back at the pleasure of our local capitalists. They are made poor by capitalist parasites in New Zealand and shipped around like sacks of potatoes. This has got to end; they have a stake in the wealth that has been plundered from them by New Zealand's corporate elites.

One Solution Revolution

The truth is workers everywhere are fit to rule. They have proven this in Egypt and throughout the Middle East, where the racist stereotypes used to justify colonialism have been utterly smashed. Ordinary working people in every nation have nothing to gain from Imperialism. In countries like New Zealand and the US, imperialism just means that more and more resources are pumped into making our local elites wealthier and wealthier through war and expropriation, while ordinary people are the ones who bleed and go without. If you want to decolonise the world, then we must smash corporate greed and we can only do that with a global workers revolution.

'geostrategic importance' and this is true. It is a region of the world that touches China, India, and the Middle East. The economic power of the United States is increasingly threatened by competition from the rising capitalist economies of countries like China, India and Brazil. By exerting its military dominance over strategic areas of the world, American capitalists and their capitalist allies in other countries are attempting to assertively reaffirm their global economic

hegemony and crowd out competing interests.

New Zealand's Imperialism

Today in Afghanistan, New Zealand has around 200 troops; despite what we are told, these soldiers are not there to build schools and help old Afghans cross the road. They are the most highly trained and lethal sections of the armed forces; most certainly part of the occupying force. Five New Zealand soldiers

New Zealand Imperialism continued...

have died in Afghanistan since 2010, three in combat. As of the date of this article, the last New Zealand soldier to die in Afghanistan is suspected to have committed suicide.

Our Capitalist class's fawning commitment to US Imperialism has led to payoffs. After Afghanistan and Iraq, New Zealand and Australia believed that they had the go-ahead to follow America's example and more aggressively assert their imperial dominance in the Pacific. In 2003, a right wing Australian think tank called 'the Australian Strategic Policy Institute', wrote a report on the Solomon Islands claiming that violence was rife, ethnic tension was simmering and that the country was on the verge of degenerating into a failed state. There wasn't a shred of evidence to support any of these claims, but despite this New Zealand and Australia went ahead with their invasion. The conscious effort to cover up this imperialism is as clear in New Zealand and Australia as it has been for America's involvement in Afghanistan. Phil Goff, the then minister of Foreign Affairs stated that New Zealand was acting on the invitation of the Solomon Islands Government and that it was vital that the intervention would not be seen as 'some kind of neo-colonial occupation or invasion'.

Then there was Tonga in 2006 when New Zealand intervened in order to quash a growing anti-monarchist movement. Despite the fact that the Tongan working class has consistently taken to the streets in opposition to its monarchy, the New Zealand government unfailingly warns rapid democratisation would cause 'instability' and that the Tongan people do not really want or are ready for democracy. While the Tongan aristocracy and royal family enrich themselves by selling off national assets and monopolising ownership of the land, the majority of Tonga's working class face poverty and political disenfranchisement. When the people of Tonga rose up, New Zealand put an end to it. The New Zealand Government sent police and army to quell the uprising. While we were being told that the occupation of Tonga was an act of good neighbourliness, the people of Tonga are fully aware that New Zealand's presence was intended to scare them into submission. In 2007, elements of the same forces that were used in Tonga were deployed in the terror raids, reminding us that New Zealand itself is a colonised land.

Gayaal Iddamalgoda

Paris Commune of 1871: Women and Revolution

"The experience of all liberation movements has shown that the success of a revolution depends on how much the women take part in it." – This is a quote from the Russian revolutionary leader Vladimir Lenin. Its truth has been proven time and again, with women being at the forefront of resistance and struggle.

Women led the march from Paris to Versailles which forced King Louis XVI and his family to move to Paris and recognise a new constitution in 1789. Women textile workers went on strike in St Petersburg to spark the Russian revolution of 1917, and women played a key role in strikes and the mass movement in the Egyptian Revolution of 2011. All throughout history women have smashed sexist stereotypes of being passive, weak females, and joined in, led and defended mass movements, revolts, riots, strikes and revolution!

Women have had to fight against their oppressors since the beginning of class society as they still do throughout the world today. But joining in the workers' struggle has not always been easy for women.

The rise of modern industry often saw men and women set against each other, as employers tried to use women as cheap labour to undermine men's traditional skills and organisations. For their part men excluded women from many skilled trades. Within the nineteenth century working-class movement there were many reactionary ideas about women, the worst perhaps being among the followers of Proudhon (an anarchist) in France, who said, 'Woman must be housewife or whore.' However Marx and Engels, in the Communist Manifesto of 1848, came down clearly on the side of women.

Women were in struggle during the rise of industrial capitalism in Britain. The poet Southey wrote about a women glovemakers' protest in 1807:

Women are more disposed to be mutinous: they stand in less fear of the law . . . and therefore in all public tumults they are foremost in violence and ferocity.

The ferocity of women was also noted in the Derby silk riots of 1833 and the 'Plug Plot' strikes in Lancashire in 1842. Women readily joined the trade unions that sprang up in the 1820s and 1830s, and were involved in Britain's first socialist movement.

Women of the Paris commune



Again in 1871 in France, during the Paris Commune thousands of women took up arms to defend the world's first workers government. Tony Cliff in 'Class Struggle and Women's Liberation' explained:

On the first day of the Commune, the 18th of March, women played a crucial role in neutralising the troops sent by Thiers to seize the cannons of the National Guard. At Montmartre General Lecomte gave the order to fire. At this the women spoke to the soldiers: 'Will you fire upon us? On your brothers? Our husbands? Our children?' General d'Aurelles de Paladine describes what happened:

The women and children came and mixed with the troops. We were greatly mistaken in permitting these people to approach our soldiers, for they mingled among them, and the women and children told them: 'You will not fire upon the people'. This is how the soldiers of the 88th, as far as I can see, and of another line regiment, found themselves surrounded and did not have the power to resist these ovations that were given them. People were shouting, "Long live the line!"

Faced with this unexpected intervention, the soldiers hesitated. A warrant officer stood in front of his company and shouted: 'Mutiny!' Thereupon the 88th battalion fraternised with the crowd. The soldiers arrested their general.

In the rue Houdon crowds of women assembled. General Susbille gave the order to charge. 'But, intimidated by the women's cries, the cavalry, "backed up their horses", which made people laugh. Everywhere ... the crowd, mostly composed of women, surrounded the soldiers, stopped the horses, cut the harnesses, forced the "bewildered" soldiers to fraternise with their "brothers"' in the National Guard.

Tony Cliff presents the writings that one reactionary writer had to say about women in the Paris commune:

The weaker sex behaved scandalously during these deplorable days ... Those who gave themselves to the Commune – and there were many – had but a single ambition: to raise themselves above the level of man by exaggerating his vices ... They were all there, agitating and squawking ... the gentleman's seamstresses; the gentleman's shirt-makers; the teachers of grown-up schoolboys; the maids-of-all-work ... What was profoundly comic was that these absconders from the workhouse unfailingly invoked Joan of Arc, and were not above comparing themselves to her ... During the final days, all of these bellicose viragos held out longer than the men did behind the barricades.

Although the Paris commune was short-lived, 72 days, the workers ran the city and women were instrumental in the rise, running and defence of the Paris Commune.

Rowan McArthur

International

Sydney wharfies strike in sympathy with Auckland comrades

The Ports of Auckland dispute went international in March as wharfies from the Maritime Union of Australia walked off the job in support of their sacked Auckland comrades. MUA members picketed Port Botany in Sydney for several days after the ship Maersk Brani, which was loaded by scab labour in Auckland, arrived in Sydney. The Maritime Union of Australia also sent a delegation to the demonstration in support of the wharfies in Auckland, and made a \$100,000 donation to the strike fund. Auckland wharfies have received a lot of support from unions internationally.

Great Council of Chiefs disbanded in Fiji

The Fijian government disbanded the Great Council of Chiefs in March, an institution that has held a central place in Fijian politics since the establishment of British rule over Fiji 130 years ago. The move comes as the military-led government of Fiji prepares for the transition to a new constitution. Fiji has been under military rule since Bainimarama usurped power in 2006 and despite the official end of martial law in earlier this year, repressive measures continue. However, while the government of New Zealand have loudly denounced Bainimarama's authoritarian government, military rule in Fiji is only possible because of division between Fiji's ethnic Fijian and Fijian-Indian populations, promoted by the policies of New Zealand in the Pacific in which the Great Council of Chiefs played a central role.

Philippine Airlines workers continue strike

Employees of Philippines' Airlines (PAL) are continuing a strike and occupation that has been running since September last year. Philippines Airlines is seeking to outsource a large portion of its staff and plans to reduce wages to only one-third of current levels. Members of the Philippines' Airlines Employees Association (PALEA) have maintained an occupation and protest camp outside the PAL terminal in Manila. In addition to maintaining their own protests, PALEA members also recently staged a demonstration in support of Auckland wharfies at the New Zealand embassy in the Philippines.



General strike in Spain

The anger at cutbacks and austerity that sparked the 'indignados' movement that occupied public squares across Spain last year exploded again with a one-day general strike on March 29. Ten million workers stuck and more than two million participated in demonstrations. In many regions nearly three quarters of the population supported the strike and there was widespread, militant picketing. After only 100 days in government, the conservative Popular Party has embarked on the greatest attacks on workers' rights since the end of the Franco dictatorship in the 1970s attacking redundancy compensation and allowing employers to lower wages without even consulting workers.

Syrian Uprising continues

The uprising in Syria continues even as the Assad regime kills as many as 70 people every day. The growing anger against Assad has also found an echo amongst the large number of Palestinian refugees who live in Syria. A protest on Palestine Land Day at the Yarmouk refugee camp in Damascus turned into an anti-Assad rally.

Palestinians condemned Assad "for daring to speak in the name of Palestine" and Hamas, one of the main Palestinian resistance organisations, has withdrawn its offices from Damascus.

However, the revolution faces a dual threat: not only from Assad, but from the West, which wants to impose a cease-fire on revolutionary forces on the West's own terms.

US soldier massacres civilians in Afghanistan

On March 11 a US staff sergeant in Afghanistan murdered 17 innocent Afghan civilians, including nine children, in one of the worst and most widely publicised atrocities since the war began more than 10 years ago. But it is not an isolated incident. From bombing of wedding parties, to the murder of three innocent civilians as "spot killings" by US troops in 2009 and the burning of Korans earlier this year, atrocities, racism and the dehumanization of Afghans are becoming increasingly more commonplace.

Shamefully, the US war machine was swift to portray the massacre as the actions of a lone individual. The US army, however, is incapable of dealing with the real issue, the insipid racism in its ranks. This racism is the logical outcome of a war waged for power and profit, which sees the most destroyed individuals placed on the front line again and again, while the epidemic of veteran suicides is ignored. Nor is it a problem restricted to the US Army - the most recent NZ casualty in

Afghanistan is suspected to be a suicide.

Uprising in Bahrain continues

As revolt grips Syria, the revolution in Bahrain also continues, although it has received comparatively little media coverage.

Thousands of activists, including many women, marched through the capital Manama in early March and battles between security forces and demonstrators are reported to be an almost nightly occurrence in towns and villages around Bahrain. The revolt has received less media coverage than those in Syria and Egypt because of links between the Al Khalifa family, which rules Bahrain, the governments of Western nations and Arab news agencies in pro-US Arab countries, such as Qatar's Al Jazeera.

US opens military base in Australia

The first soldiers to staff a new US military base at Darwin in Australia's Northern Territory arrived in April. The base at Darwin is part of a more aggressive stance by the US and its allies

in the Asia-Pacific region, and raises tensions with other regional powers, especially China. A drone base is also to be established in the Australian-controlled Cocos Islands off the coast of Malaysia. US military personnel also arrived in NZ in April to participate in joint training exercises in New Zealand for the first time since the suspension of the ANZUS alliance in the 1980s.

Pan-European Fascist rally flops

Anti-fascist demonstrators defeated attempts by European Fascist groups to stage a mass demonstration in Aarhus, Denmark on April 2nd. The meeting of far-right groups from Britain, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Poland and Germany managed to draw barely 150 people. In contrast, events held by anti-racist demonstrators drew over 8,000 supporters. A coalition of groups opposed to racism including trade unions, student groups, left parties and community organisations rallied in the town square and confronted the fascists, despite the local council urging people to stay at home.

"Kony 2012" goes viral, Ugandans unimpressed

An internet campaign targeting Joseph Kony, the leader of a rebel group in Northern Uganda went viral in February and March.

The campaign, "Kony 2012" was started by the US-based charity "Invisible Children", and is calling for US military support for the Ugandan government, to hunt down Kony for human rights abuses, including the use of child soldiers - despite the fact that Kony's group no longer poses any threat in Uganda.

Viewers of the Kony 2012 video in Uganda - including Kony's victims - were outraged at the insensitive and racist portrayal of Africans in the film, and that it misrepresented the conflict. "How can the issue of northern Uganda be discussed by just a 3-year-old American kid who does not know anything to do with our plight? We are afraid that every American child will now look at every mature black African as a bad person," reported one North Ugandan resident to the Associated Press.

Briefs written by Cory Anderson

Syria: crisis, revolution, war

[We have extracted this from Alex Callinicos' editorial in the latest International Socialism journal. You can read the full piece online at www.isj.org.uk]

As usual, the problems are most concentrated in the Middle East. The Obama administration has high hopes of living with an Egyptian government that is likely to be dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood, the main victor in the parliamentary elections at the end of last year. The increasingly bloody struggle between the Syrian regime and the revolutionary movement poses a more immediate problem.

The Ba'athist regime under Hafez al-Assad and (since 2000) his son Bashar has long been a thorn in Washington's side. Nevertheless, the Western powers are not keen to repeat the military intervention they mounted last year against the much more pliant regime of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya. Memories of the Iraq debacle have combined with awareness of Syrian society's complex religious fragmentation, and fears of the impact of an intervention in Syria on neighbouring Lebanon and on the West's fast-deteriorating relationship with Iran have held them back. Russia and China, who feel they were hoodwinked into allowing regime change in Libya, have blocked lesser measures at the United Nations Security Council. But it is clear that various kinds of covert support are being funnelled to sections of the rebel forces by the US and its allies and by the Gulf states, headed by Saudi Arabia and Qatar, which are seizing the opportunity to install in Syria a friendly regime no doubt aligned to their co-religionists in the Sunni Muslim majority in Syria (the Assad regime's core support comes from the Alawi minority, members

of which dominate the key military and security apparatuses).

As part of his effort to win "strategic parity" with Israel, the elder Assad strove with great determination and utter ruthlessness to give Damascus primacy in the Lebanon and a veto over any settlement of the Palestinian question. As a result of his efforts, geopolitics overlays the domestic polarisation between the regime and its revolutionary opponents in a way that was largely absent from the essentially internally driven struggle between Hosni Mubarak and the Egyptian Revolution at the beginning of 2011. But the revolutions in Egypt and Syria have unleashed a complex process of realignment. Thus the key Palestinian movement, Hamas, which was till recently based in Damascus, has broken with the Assad regime and sided with the revolution. There is more to this welcome decision than meets the eye. Hamas is an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, which is now the most powerful political actor in Egypt (albeit in uneasy partnership with the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces). The greatest single crime of Hafez al-Assad, the bloody destruction of Hama in 1982 that cost an estimated 25,000 lives (the model for the slaughter being inflicted on Homs by his son), was the climax of a savage internal war between his regime and opposition forces, including the Brotherhood. Egged on by Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the Brotherhood is now flexing its muscles across the region and turning against the Assad regime.

All this makes the talk of war by the US and Israel against the Islamic Republican regime in Iran even more dangerous than usual. The elder Assad moved very quickly after the Iranian Revolution

of 1978-9 to align with Tehran (in part as a counterweight against his hated Ba'athist rival in Iraq, Saddam Hussein). Iran is now his son's strongest supporter, supplying weapons and advisers to help crush the revolution. The Saudis have long been rumoured to be pressing for military action against Iran. The political realignments described above have an ugly sectarian dimension, pitting Sunnis against the Assad regime, based on religious minorities, and its Shi'ite allies in Iran and Lebanon, where the leadership of Hezbollah has set its face against the Syrian revolution.

Add to this the apparent determination by the Israeli Prime Minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, to mount a pre-emptive strike against Iran's nuclear programme, and you have an explosive cocktail indeed. Israel wants, of course, to preserve its nuclear monopoly in the region, but is probably also motivated by the desire, after losing a key ally with Mubarak's fall, to weaken a powerful rival. There seems no enthusiasm for an attack on Iran in Washington. Obama, busy realigning US global strategy to meet the geopolitical challenge represented by China, has no desire to step into another Middle Eastern quagmire (and is speeding up withdrawal from Afghanistan, where recent events have underlined how the West's grip is slipping). But Netanyahu will no doubt seek to exploit the US presidential contest, where the rival Republicans are outdoing themselves in their protestations of loyalty to Israel, to pressure him into supporting an attack on Iran. So there may be another war in the Middle East this year.

This cheerful prospect encourages some people on the left to argue that the struggle for Syria is over



determined by its geopolitical context. For them, the support that the West and the Gulf states are giving some of the revolutionary forces is definite proof that a version of regime change on the Libyan model is under way. They also talk up the “progressive” character of the Assad regime, pointing to its support for the Palestinian struggle. This is an astonishing claim when one remembers that Hafez al-Assad sent the Syrian army into Lebanon in March 1976 to prevent the alliance of the Lebanese left and the Palestinian movement from winning the civil war against the Christian right and had his troops bombard the Palestinian fighters of Fatah in Tripoli in November-December 1983.

In his meticulous and carefully balanced study of Syria under the elder Assad, Hanna Batatu sums up his relationship with the Palestinian movement:

In Lebanon, the scene of recurring clashes of interests between Fatah and Syria's regime, Assad...successively gave support and dealt blows by straightforward or roundabout means to every major element involved in the civil war, and drove wedges in the ranks of the two sides to the conflict, weakening in due course both of

them and altering the local balance of forces in his favour. Similarly, when he had difficulty bending the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organisation] to his purposes, he activated the Palestinian factions answerable to him, and through them attempted to win over independent Palestinian organisations—the PFLP [Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine] and the DFLP [Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine]—with a view to undermining Fatah and paralysing its leading role; and, when opportunity offered, he fostered a split within Fatah itself.

Batatu quotes what he calls the “unforgettable” words of a Palestinian woman in Tripoli in 1983: “‘Hafez al-Assad’, she screamed, ‘is more Israeli than the Israelis!’” Denunciations of Hamas for taking Gulf money are equally dubious: the longstanding dependence of the Palestinian resistance on support from the Arab regimes is an old political problem that also affected supposedly left wing groups such as the PFLP and the DFLP, but it no more makes Hamas their puppet than it did Fatah. Nor is it plausible to describe as “anti-imperialist” a regime that participated in the US-led coalition against Iraq during the 1991 Gulf War. As Batatu shows,

despite the sectarian core of their regime, the Assads have ruled in the interests, both domestic and regional, of the Syrian bourgeoisie.

...the immediate political question is obvious: is there is a genuine popular movement against the regime? Evidently there is: what is astonishing is how sustained the revolution has been despite the slaughter of an estimated 8,000 by the regime's forces. There is also another important question: could the West and the Gulf states hijack this revolution, as happened in Libya? Again the answer is in the affirmative. But that is no reason for backing Assad against the people he is slaughtering. Western leaders' fear of the Syrian masses was underlined by David Cameron's remark on the way to Washington in mid-March that he wanted to see “a transition where Assad goes, rather than a revolution from the bottom”. Again and again struggles in the Middle East have had to confront two enemies—the imperialist powers (and their Israeli watchdog) and the local ruling classes. Syria is the latest case of this dialectic, and the form it takes there could wreck the revolution. But that is no reason to alter the stance we have taken ever since the fall of Ben Ali in Tunisia—with the Arab revolutions and against Western intervention.

Hikoi

Continued from back cover

Muliaga had serious medical conditions and needed an oxygen machine. Her family had been trying to negotiate with Mercury over payments, and yet the disconnection went ahead. Now four children are without a mother because of the vindictiveness and spite of this company. It was corporate murder.

This example shows why we oppose privatisation, and the SOE model: they involve running public goods – water, power, forestry, transport – as private business opportunities. These assets need nationalised, and put under workers' control. They should be run for human need, not corporate profit.

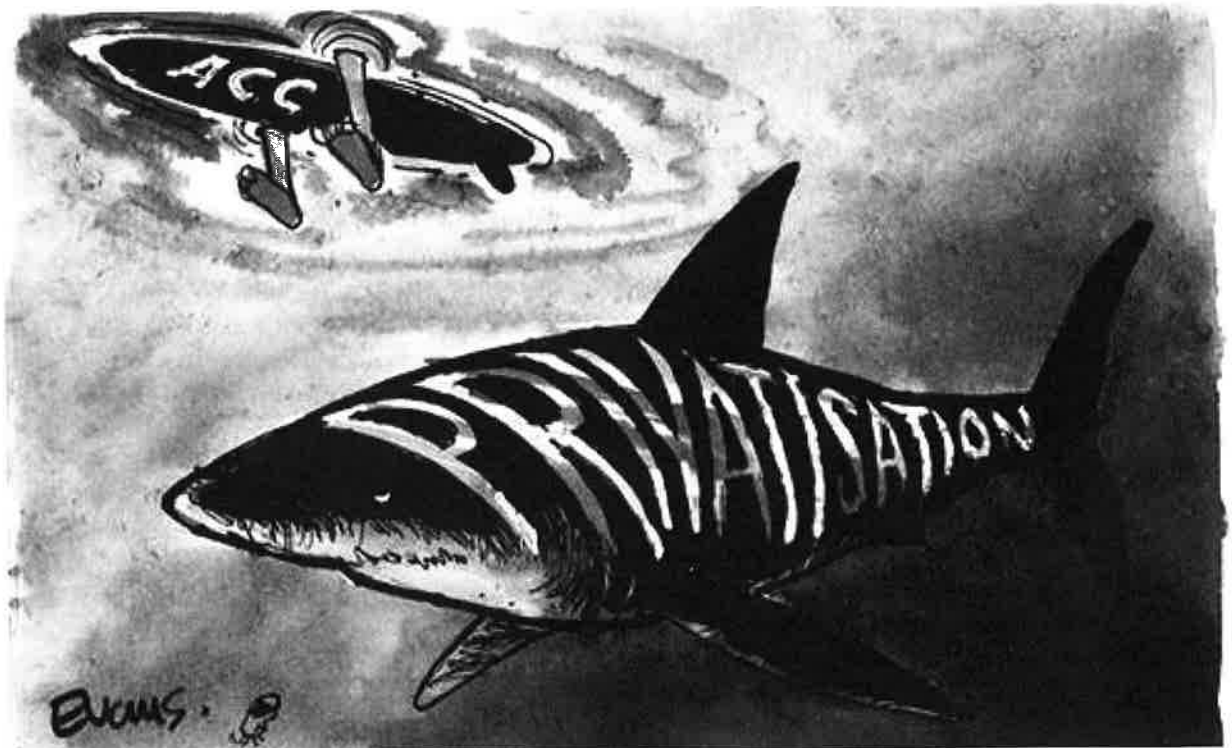
Privatisation has been so obvious a failure across the last two decades, though, that this can seem like a common-sense argument. In fact there are antagonistic class interests in play.

Non-political?

Hikoi organisers describe "Aotearoa is not for sale" as a "non-political event providing an opportunity for all people across all sectors to oppose privatization." But this appeal to a "non-political" campaign for all "people" obscures real class divisions that shape who will be hurt, and who will benefit, from privatisation.

But this is of course a deeply political question. Most working-class and non-elite Maori have responded to the government's privatisation plans with disgust, while the elites represented by the Iwi Leadership Group are already couching their criticisms of the plans in such a way as to leave them in a good position to invest when privatisation goes ahead. Pakeha workers have overwhelmingly rejected government plans for privatisation – opinion polls before the last election showed clear majorities against Key's plans. And yet many local "mum and dad investors" (for which read big business) are keen to make money buying up assets cheap.

It's right that no one party or group should try and own the hikoi, and right that kaumatua and tamariki lead it, symbolising what is at stake. But we need to be clear also about the political fights that face us: debates over strategy, orientation, and political line.



Against Nationalism



Our main enemy is at home: Over 1000 meatworkers have been locked out by their New Zealand based employer.

The New Zealand left has long been infected with a poisonous type of nationalism, and events like this bring out its worst aspects. There's a real danger that talk of Aotearoa being "not for sale" can distract us back into the dead-end of nationalism.

We need to be clear: the real enemy is at home. It is Key, the National Party, and the local business elite who are pushing through privatisation, not so-called 'foreigners'. Besides, our internationalism as a class is our strength: look at all the workers, Maori, migrant, and Pakeha, standing firm on the Meatworkers' picket lines through the North Island at the moment.

Privatisation into NZ hands would be no better and no worse than privatisation into 'foreign' hands. Capitalists the world over have the same interests – profits above all else. Our 'local' capitalists are no better than their foreign cousins, and have carried out plenty of vicious attacks in their time. Just think of beer baron Doug Myers, champion of privatisation through the 1980s and 1990s.

At its best, nationalism confuses and disorients our side. What does it mean to say John Key "isn't a

real Kiwi", as someone posted on the "Aotearoa is not for sale" Facebook page? The Tally's family who have locked out over 1000 meatworkers are based in New Zealand. The business is 'local' but they are just as bad as any 'foreign' capitalists. To bring their 'kiwi' credentials into disrepute is wrong. Whether kiwi or foreign, businesses run on the bottom line: profit! It is this system that puts profits before human needs that must be destroyed.

At its worst, though, this nationalism becomes dangerous. With public discontent riding high, and anger palpable, plenty of politicians and figures on the right will try and abuse workers' anger for sinister ends. Anti-Asian attacks are on the rise, and over a hundred skinhead thugs marched through Christchurch recently. Nationalist appeals open a space for these toxic currents to grow. It's a worry that the quasi-fascist *Uncensored* magazine pops up on the first page of a Google search for "Aotearoa is not for sale."

Fighting nationalism and nationalist rhetoric inside our ranks isn't about insisting on purity, then, or being pedantic over language. It's an essential political battle.

Dougal McNeil

Hikoi

AGAINST ASSET SALES AGAINST NATIONALISM

Aotearoa is not for sale

The hikoi gathering through April to protest at asset sales, is another sign of the growing mood of resistance that's coming to characterize John Key's second term. The hikoi organizers are calling on all "concerned people against privatisation, asset sales, welfare reforms, deep water oil drilling, coal mining, fracking and the TPPA" to join them, and the inter-connections between these attacks offer a great chance to both strengthen each campaign, and to draw activists into the kind of political discussions and debates that are needed for us to form wider networks and coalitions with which to take on this government's anti-worker agenda. It may be autumn here but, politically, "Aotearoa is not for sale" is perhaps a sign of spring.

The International Socialist Organisation supports the hikoi. We are opposed to further privatisation, and our members and supporters will be mobilising to build these rallies. But there are important debates the movement needs to have, too, particularly to save our side from the dead end of nationalism.

Against asset sales

It's clear that Key's plan for further privatisation and asset sales – however it is dressed up as 'partial privatisation' or sale to 'mum and dad investors' – will be bad for workers.

The last big round of privatisations – and the move to make public goods like power companies "State Owned Enterprises", and thus dictated to by the profit motive and the discipline of the market – led to poorer services and higher prices. Richard Prebble sacked thousands from NZ Rail in the 1980s, saying it needed to be modernised and made efficient: its private owners took the next step in the 2000s, ending almost all non-freight rail service in the South Island. Power privatisation has had needlessly tragic consequences.

Who can forget the story of Folole Muliaga, the Auckland teacher who died in 2007 when Mercury Energy cut off her connection as punishment for her family being late in their payment of a measly \$168.40 power bill?

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